

Lady Beetles: The Insect Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

**By: Sheldon Hammond
Fayette County Extension Agent**



Many gardeners call the Fayette County Extension Office during the summer time for tips to attract lady beetles to their garden sites. Many are even willing to purchase these precious beneficial insects. However, the calls now to the Extension Service are "How do I get rid of these pesky lady beetles that are invading my home?" Is this the same insect? Beloved during the spring and summer time and despised during the winter, the lady beetle or lady bug as some people call them is the insect version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

As Dr. Jekyll, the lady beetle is a highly successful predator of insect pests in the garden and landscape. They will attack and eat both immature and adults stages of many insects. Although lady beetles are not particularly picky about what they eat, they are most frequently found eating on aphids, mealybugs, scale insects, mites and other soft bodied insects. Due to this voracious appetite, these little insects are highly sought after by experienced gardeners as a way to reduce pesticide applications on their plants.

With this theory in mind, several new exotic lady beetle species were introduced into Southern Georgia to battle damaging insect pest on several of our agronomic crops such as pecans, corn, cotton, apples and ornamentals. One of these species was the Asian lady beetle. These beetles once released moved northward toward our part of the state.

As winter approaches, the Asian lady beetles start to congregate in large numbers looking for places to hibernate. Their preferred hibernation habitat is large cavities such as tree hollows and under rocks. However, they have rapidly adapted to houses as a great place to hibernate. They are particularly attracted to light colored structures with sunny southwest exposures. On sunny winter days some homeowners can find literally thousands of these crawling all over the house. On occasion these lady beetles find a way inside the household. This is when people view them as Mr. Hyde. They can be very pesky as they crawl over walls, ceilings and floors and hide in corners and cracks of the house.

However, remember that lady beetles do not bite, sting or carry human diseases. Nor, do they feed on wood, clothing or human food or reproduce inside the home.

If you are dealing with the Mr. Hyde lady beetle, here are some tips to help control them inside your house.



To prevent lady beetles from entering the house, use a good quality caulk to seal cracks and crevices around windows, doors, siding, utility pipes and other openings.

Install insect screening (20 mesh maximum) over attic and

exhaust vents to prevent entry.



Remove lady beetles inside the home with a broom and dust pan or vacuum cleaner and release the captured beetles outdoors in sheltered areas.

Avoid killing those found indoors by spraying them with insecticide or squashing them.



Handling lady beetles or picking them off the walls can stress the beetles. Stressed beetles secrete an orange substance that can stain walls and fabrics.

So are lady beetles your Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde? Once you understand their beneficial aspects and know how to deal with them during the winter, there is little doubt that the benefits of Dr. Jekyll outweighs the nuisance of Mr. Hyde.

For more information on lady beetles or other insects, feel free to call or visit us at the Fayette County Extension Service in the Fayette County Administrative Complex, Suite 209 in Fayetteville. The phone number is (770) 460-5730 ext. 5412. The Extension Service has over 400 free publications worth reading including classics such as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde lady beetles.